

ROLL BACK WATER PRIVATISATION; NO TO PRE PAID WATER METERS

- **MCGM proposes back door water privatisation.**
- **Citizens challenge proposal to introduce pre paid water meters**
- **Agitated citizens attacked by Goondas**
- **MCGM files cases of unlawful assembly against seven protesting activists who joined 'Public Consultation'**

Mumbai Paani, Pani Haq Abhiyan and citizens of Mumbai stalled the Public consultation in Mumbai called by the MCGM to discuss water reforms in Mumbai. The public consultation was called to present the findings of the World Bank appointed consultant firm Castalia at Deenanath Hall, on 13th November 2007. The consultation was attended by the honorable mayor, corporators, representative of the World Bank, PPIAF, CEO of Castalia, NGO's, CBO's, Youth groups, and general citizens.

The citizens challenged the MCGM proposal on the basis of Castalia Report to divide Mumbai into different zones and give contracts for water works. The MCGM had earlier promised in earlier public consultations that no decision on the Castalia report will be made without due consultation with the general public. Contrarily to these public statements, the Standing Committee decided to outsource water works, invited tenders and allotted six companies in six zones without public consultation and consent. Moreover the outsourcing decision was taken despite the total rejection by the citizen groups of the different water privatisation models recommended by Castalia at the 2nd stakeholders meeting on June 03, 2007. Even the Hydraulic Department have rejected this report saying that Castalia's findings are not new for them but their hands are tied by the functional constraints within the MCGM

Surprisingly the MCGM has come out with solutions like pre-paid water meters for post 1995 slums which even the World Bank consultant did not propose. This has been done without looking into the experiences of different countries where pre paid meters were introduced where the poor has been denied water because of poor purchasing capacity leading to epidemics like cholera and death. While many people's organisations have expressed their willingness to pay affordable rates for legal access to water, we believe it is the responsibility of the state to provide basic services to its citizens, especially the marginalised and the destitute.

We question the farce of public consultation and demand that the reforms be immediately rolled back. The reforms proposed by the MCGM represent a situation where one crawls, when asked to kneel. It is by no exaggeration when one young activist doubted an underlying corruption and accused the MCGM of being an agent of World Bank.

It is quite unfortunate that the activists who raised their voice in the public consultation were beaten up by goondas of the Chairman of the Standing Committee. It is even funnier when MCGM filed a criminal case of unlawful assembly against those who came for the public consultation. We call upon every political party, people's representatives, intelligentsia, artists, students and general citizens to join hands to defeat the evil designs of privatising water and fight to right to water for all.

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Press Release | 15th November 2007

- Six anti water privatization activists arrested in Mumbai.
- Municipal authorities exerts undue pressure on Mumbai Police to harass activists
- Right to democratic dissent questioned

Mumbai Police today arrested six water activists opposing water privatization in Mumbai on the complaint filed by Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM). Mumbai's water activists had participated and raised questions at the public consultation organized by the MCGM on water sector reforms in Mumbai on 13th November 2007.

The case was filed by Mr. Madhukar Maruthi Kamble, Hydrological Engineer of the Municipal Corporation against six activists which include Sitaram Shelar, Manic Prabhavati, Bhagawan Keshbhat, Sandeep Yavle, Nitin Kubal, Pravin Kamble of Paani Haq Abhiyan (Water Rights campaign) and Sadik Basha of Democratic Youth Federation of India. They were accused of 'unlawful assembly', 'rioting', 'provoking breach of peace' etc under sections 143, 147, 149, 323, 341 and 504 of Indian Penal Code (IPC). The activists were later released in the evening on personal bond.

Mumbai Pani and Pani Haq Abhiyan strongly condemn this move by the Municipal Corporation and protest the arrest. The activists had attended the consultation on the invitation of the MCGM and challenged the MCGM proposal for water privatisation in the city. Those who raised objection against MCGM move were identified, beaten up by the goons of the corporators who were questioned for allowing water privatisation and pre-paid meters in Mumbai. It is even funnier that the organisers, the municipal authority (MCGM) filed a criminal case of unlawful assembly against those who were invited to participate in the public consultation. We strongly condemn this highly undemocratic attitude of the municipal administration. The Mumbai Police were initially denying the bail to the activists under the

undue pressure from the MCGM, even though all the sections were bail-able under IPC. The police had also called the Riot Police (RAF) to deal with the activists if they protest against the arrest. But finally the police relented only after the intervention of senior advocates and released them all.

The attempt by the MCGM to stifle democratic dissent and arrest water activists shows that they are interested to push their privatization agenda and does not want to engage in genuine consultation with the citizens. The MCGM had also made a farce of the public consultation after issuing contracts to private companies for water works in six zones of Mumbai and issuing the expression of interest for introduction of pre-paid water meters. Filing of criminal cases against those who protested these sinister moves shows the anti democratic character of the Municipal administration. It is quite clear whom the municipal authorities are trying to please. The mass protests against the privatisation move on 13th November was a big set back to the World Bank and the PPIAF who had funded the MCGM to bring in water reforms in Mumbai.

The fight against water privatization is no more restricted to the K-east ward, where the pilot study was done by Castalia with the financial help from the PPIAF and the World Bank. The struggle has now spread to all over Mumbai as is evident by the mass support and solidarity we are receiving from various organizations, trade unions and residents from settlements across the city.

We believe the MCGM should take stock of the public resentment against water privatization and stop the introduction of prepaid water meters. The Municipal authorities should rethink their plan to bring in water reforms through private participation and engage in genuine consultations with the public at large who are keen to bring in reforms to get over water problems through their active participation.

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